

Jesus Always

B I B L E S T U D Y S E R I E S



FOLLOWING
GOD'S DIRECTION

Sarah Young

*Bible study and discussion questions
written by Karen Lee-Thorp*

FOLLOWING GOD'S DIRECTION

JESUS CALLING® BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Volume 1: Experiencing God's Presence

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JESUS ALWAYS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

FOLLOWING GOD'S DIRECTION

EIGHT SESSIONS

Sarah Young

with Karen Lee-Thorp



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes our busy and difficult lives give us the impression that God is silent. We cry out to Him, but our feelings tell us He isn't answering our prayers. In this, our feelings are incorrect. God hears the prayers of His children and speaks directly into the situations in which we find ourselves. The trouble is that our lives are often too hectic, our minds too distracted, for us to take in what He offers.

This *Jesus Always* Bible study is designed to help individuals and groups meditate on the words of Scripture and hear them not just as words said to people long ago but as words said to us today in the here and now. The goal is to help the heart open up and respond to what the mind reads—to encounter the living God as He speaks through the Scriptures. The writer to the Hebrews tells us:

INTRODUCTION

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

—HEBREWS 1:1–3

God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament gives us the chance to walk with Jesus, see what He does, and hear Him speak into the sometimes-confusing situations in which we find ourselves. The Old Testament tells the story of how God prepared a people to be the family of Jesus, and in the experiences of those men and women, we find our own lives mirrored.

THE GOAL OF THIS SERIES

The *Jesus Always Bible Study Series* offers you a chance to lay down your cares, enter God's Presence, and hear Him speak through His Word. You will get to spend some time silently studying a passage of Scripture, and then, if you're meeting with a group, openly sharing your insights and hearing what others discovered. You'll also get to discuss excerpts from the *Jesus Always* devotional that relate to the themes of the Bible passages. In this way, you will learn how to better make space in your life for the Spirit of God to speak to you through the Word of God and the people of God.

THE FLOW OF EACH SESSION

Each session of this study guide contains the following elements:

- **CONSIDER IT.** The two questions in this opening section serve as an icebreaker to help you start thinking about the theme of

the session, connecting it to your own past or present experience, and allowing you to get to know the others in your group more deeply. If you've had a busy day and your mind is full of distractions, these questions can help you better focus.

- **EXPERIENCE IT.** Here you will find two readings from *Jesus Always* along with some questions for reflection. This is your chance to talk with others about the biblical principles found within the *Jesus Always* devotions. Can you relate to what each reading describes? What insights from God's Word does it illuminate? What does it motivate you to do? This section will assist you in applying these biblical principles to your everyday habits.
- **STUDY IT.** Next you'll explore a Scripture passage connected to the session topic and the readings from *Jesus Always*. You will not only analyze these Bible passages but also pray through them in ways designed to engage your heart and your head. You'll first talk with your group about what the verse or verses mean and then spend several minutes in silence, letting God speak into your life through His Word.
- **LIVE IT.** Finally, you will find five days' worth of suggested Scripture passages that you can pray through on your own during the week. Suggested questions for additional study and reflection are provided.

FOR LEADERS

If you are leading a group through this study guide, please see the Leader's Notes at the end of the guide. You'll find background on the design of the study as well as suggested answers for some of the study questions.



SESSION 1

FOLLOWING GOD BY TREASURING HIS WISDOM

CONSIDER IT

Each day we're deluged by *data*—the jumble of facts, pseudo-facts, thoughts, images, sounds, and opinions that floods our awareness every waking moment if we don't deliberately shut it out. With effort, we *can* organize and manage some portion of that data in a way that makes sense for us and helps us process our surroundings.

Most of us feel pretty good if we can contain some of the overflow at any given moment. But the biblical writers weren't impressed by mere information. They push us to think long and hard about what is truly important and then reflect only on the information that's valuable so we can honestly say we have *knowledge* about things that really matter. Beyond knowledge, the biblical writers urge us to pursue a heart-level understanding of how to live well in the world—and then put that understanding into practice. The word they use for applying this understanding to attain a life well lived is *wisdom*.

Wisdom doesn't always come quickly or effortlessly. It can't be downloaded. But if we want to learn to discern God's direction, the place to start is by setting our sights on wisdom. In this session, we'll begin to consider what wisdom is and how we can attain it.

1. *What are some of the sources of information that pour into your life each day?*

2. *How does all this information affect you? How does it influence your ability to discern what God might be saying to you?*

EXPERIENCE IT

I am your Treasure! Sometimes you feel frazzled—pulled this way and that by people and circumstances around you. Your yearning for meaning and deep connection drives you into more and more activity. Even when your body is still, your mind tends to race—anticipating future problems and searching for solutions. You need to remember that *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Me*. Remind yourself of this glorious truth frequently, whispering: “Jesus, You are my Treasure. In You I am complete.”

When you prize Me above all else, making Me your *First Love*, you are protected from feeling fragmented. Whenever you find your thoughts straying, you can train your mind to return to the One who completes you. This gives focus to your life and helps you stay close to Me. Living near Me, enjoying My Presence, involves seeking to *obey My commands*. I am telling you this *so that My Joy may be in you and that your Joy may be complete*.

—FROM JESUS ALWAYS, JANUARY 9

3. *In Genesis 15:1, God told Abraham, “I am your . . . exceedingly great reward” (NKJV). What does it mean to uphold God as your great reward? In what way is He your treasure?*

4. *According to the Bible, why is turning to Jesus the best way to deal with problems versus letting your mind race about potential solutions?*

I guide you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths. Wisdom can be defined as “the ability to make good decisions based on knowledge and experience.” So it’s important to learn what is true and apply that knowledge to your life—especially your decisions. Since *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*, I’m the best Guide imaginable. I am also *the Word who was with God and is God*. The way of wisdom found in the written Word guides you very effectively. So study My Word and stay near Me as you journey through this world.

Look for and follow the *straight paths* I have for you. I don’t promise that these paths will always be easy. But if you walk close to Me, your journey will be much less circuitous. When you look ahead, you perceive confusing bends and turns. Yet when you look back at the ground you’ve already covered, you can see that I have been with you each step of the way—shielding you from dangers, removing obstacles, straightening out your path.

—FROM *JESUS ALWAYS*, JUNE 19

5. *As you look back at your life, what good and not-so-good decisions do you see? Would you say you’ve been developing wisdom over time? Explain.*

6. *How do you go about learning what is true?*

STUDY IT

Read aloud the following verses from Proverbs 2:1–15, 20–22. As you do, note that the book of Proverbs is framed as wise counsel from a father to a son. Before the father gives advice about things such as money, friends, and success, he begins by motivating his son to listen closely to what he has to say. He wants to encourage young readers everywhere to value wisdom. Also, he writes in Hebrew poetry, in which the two halves of each verse echo one another. The second half builds on the idea from the first half as it repeats the core idea of the verse.

- ¹ My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
- ² turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
- ³ indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
- ⁴ and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
- ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.
- ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
- ⁷ He holds success in store for the upright,
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
- ⁸ for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones.
- ⁹ Then you will understand what is right and just
and fair—every good path.
- ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.
- ¹¹ Discretion will protect you,
and understanding will guard you.

SESSION 1

- ¹² Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse,
¹³ who have left the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,
¹⁴ who delight in doing wrong
and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,
¹⁵ whose paths are crooked
and who are devious in their ways. . . .
²⁰ Thus you will walk in the ways of the good
and keep to the paths of the righteous.
²¹ For the upright will live in the land,
and the blameless will remain in it;
²² but the wicked will be cut off from the land,
and the unfaithful will be torn from it.

7. *Underline the verbs in each line of verses 1–5. How does the writer want his reader to treat wisdom? Why do you think he wants the reader to do this?*

8. *According to verses 6–8, to whom does the Lord give wisdom? What does it mean to be “blameless”?*

9. *What will wisdom do for those who heed it, according to verses 11–15 and 20–22? How does wisdom accomplish this?*

10. *How can a person look for wisdom “as for silver” and search for it “as for hidden treasure” (verse 4)?*

11. *How does the Bible provide instructions from God about what we are to do and not do in any given situation?*

12. *Take two minutes of silence to reread the passage, looking for a sentence, phrase, or even one word that stands out as something Jesus may want you to focus on in your life. If you’re meeting with a group, the leader will keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, you may share with the group the word or phrase that came to you in the silence.*

13. *Read the passage aloud again. Take another two minutes of silence, prayerfully considering what response God might want you to make to what you have read in His Word. If you're meeting with a group, the leader will again keep track of time. At the end of two minutes, you may share with the group what came to you in the silence if you wish.*

14. *If you're meeting with a group, how can the members pray for you? If you're using this study on your own, what would you like to say to God right now?*

LIVE IT

At the end of each session, you'll find suggested Scripture readings for spending time alone with God during five days of the coming week. This week's readings are focused on obtaining biblical wisdom. Read each passage slowly, pausing to think about what is being said. Rather than approaching this as an assignment to complete, think of it as an opportunity to meet with the One who loves you most. Use any of the questions that are helpful.

Day 1

Read Colossians 2:1–4. In the New Testament, a “mystery” (verse 2) is something God has kept as a secret for a long time but has now revealed (or

will reveal someday). What do you think Paul means when he says that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (verse 3)?

Why does Paul want the Colossians to understand the mystery of Christ (see verse 4)?

What are some “riches” of understanding that you want God to reveal to you today?

Thank God today for revealing the “mystery” of Christ to His children.

Day 2

Read Colossians 1:9–12. How do God’s children come to understand His will (see verse 9)?

SESSION 1

Why does God give Christians the knowledge of His will (see verse 10)? Is His goal to make life as easy as possible for His children? Why or why not?

Paul speaks in verse 11 about endurance and patience. How do you think wisdom strengthens a believer's endurance and patience?

Pray to receive the wisdom and understanding the Holy Spirit provides. Ask Him to help you lead a life worthy of Christ.

Day 3

Read Colossians 1:25–29. Paul speaks not just of the mystery of Christ but also of the mystery of Christ in believers. If you're a devoted follower of Jesus, in what way is "Christ in you" a secret that has now been revealed?

What does it mean to admonish someone with wisdom (verse 28)?

When have you been admonished with wisdom? How did that affect you?

Listen today for the Lord's guiding voice of wisdom. Pay attention to Him in your circumstances.

Day 4

Read Ephesians 1:17–20. Why does Paul refer to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation” (verse 17)? What does that tell you about the Spirit?

The main point of growing in wisdom is to know God better (verse 17). How does knowing God lead to better decisions?

Think about this word picture: “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (verse 18). What do you think “the eyes of your heart” means? Why are the eyes of the heart so important?

SESSION 1

Look for a time today to use the “eyes of your heart.” In that situation, ask God to enlighten you and guide you through it.

Day 5

Read Ecclesiastes 7:11–12. How is wisdom like an inheritance of money?

How is wisdom better than inheriting money?

Which do you tend to value more: wisdom or money? What is the evidence?

Ask God to help you treat wisdom as more valuable than money. Watch for a time to put that into practice during your day.